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1986—The Marxist Disciplining of the Cultural Studies Project

by Sebastiaan Gorissen | Issue 10.1 (Spring 2021), Years in Cultural Studies

ABSTRACT Since its infancy, the pluralistic tendencies of the cultural studies project denied methodological and procedural consistency and resisted any disciplining of cultural studies as an attempt at authoritarian policing. Over the course of the 1980s, cultural studies continued to spread beyond the United Kingdom to Australia and the United States, initially, and the rest of the world soon thereafter. Movements towards the bridging of the longstanding divisions between fact and interpretation—between the social sciences and the humanities—under the sign of a principled approach to cultural democracy saw the Althusserian Marxism characteristic of earlier cultural studies scholarship expanded by way of a critical re/engagement of the works of Gramsci. This period of ideological critique allowed for a bold intellectual, political commitment to the re/conceptualization of culture as a site of class struggle, hegemonic formation, and structural signification. Particularly, the year 1986 saw major strides in this direction with the publication of monumental manuscripts by Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe.

KEYWORDS 1986, Althusserian Marxism, cultural studies, disciplinarity, Marxism

Introduction

The pluralistic tendencies of the cultural studies project have long denied methodological and procedural consistency, resisting any disciplining as an attempt at authoritarian policing. As cultural studies continued to spread beyond the United Kingdom over the course of the 1980s, movements towards the bridging of the longstanding divisions between the social sciences and the humanities—under the sign of a principled approach to cultural democracy—saw the Althusserian Marxism characteristic of earlier cultural studies scholarship expanded by way of a critical re/engagement of the works of Gramsci. This period of ideological critique allowed for a bold intellectual, political commitment to the re/conceptualization of culture as a site of class struggle, hegemonic formation, and structural signification. To understand the ways in which the cultural studies project continued to spread outside the United Kingdom over the course of the 1980s and the ways in which "cultural studies circulated among scholars in varying disciplines while still in its infancy," it is essential to chronicle the development and allure of the project's (lack of) tenets, definitions, and characteristics.[1] Particularly, the year 1986 saw major strides in this direction with the publication of monumental manuscripts by Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe.

In this article, I explicate the ways in which the sub/cultural shifts following the end of the Second World War would inspire a legitimated and disciplined cultural studies, fueled by the international expansion of cultural studies scholarship and its subsequent influx of alternative perspectives and modes of analysis over the course of the 1970s and 1980s.

Next, I highlight the ways in which these shifts encouraged cultural studies scholars to deploy categorical devices from across the social sciences, productively drawing out contradictions among these approaches with constant vigilance over their own agendas and methodologies. I explore the ways in which these processes of exploration were amplified by the emergence of a critical cultural studies in the wake of the incorporation of the British tradition of cultural studies into the field of American mass communication studies in the early 1980s, ushering in a critical paradigm that would come to a head over the course of the next few years, crowned by major publications in 1986. Finally, I argue that the theoretical implications of this Gramscian neo-Marxist symbiosis of cultural studies reverberate until the present day.

Cultural Studies and the Imbrication of Power and Subjectivity

Of course, cultural studies did not come into being in a vacuum, and we cannot trace its origins to a singular individual or a single group of scholars. Nevertheless, much may be gained from closely considering the careers of Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, and Raymond Williams. Based in the United Kingdom after the Second World War, these Leftist intellectuals would seek to understand the various intersections of class and nation at the levels of lived experience and social structure. They were inspired by the sub/cultural shifts following the end of the Second World War, and from them they gained an interdisciplinary attachment to culture and the popular. By the mid-1950s, universities across the United Kingdom were expanding their admission processes beyond considerations of class, wealth, and ancestry, and made meaningful strides towards inclusion based on talent and ability. This movement of reformation would continue into the 1960s and 1970s, strengthened by the establishment of universities in academically underserved communities across the country and the broader Western world.

Serving as professor of English at Birmingham University between 1962 and 1973, Hoggart founded the institution’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in 1964. This period of growth, popularity, and prosperity would become the central impetus behind the adolescence of cultural studies, marking the project as a revolutionary curricular alternative to the traditional humanities and social science disciplines. Recognizing the importance of an interdisciplinary curriculum, early cultural studies scholars in the United Kingdom opened the possibility of developing a new kind of pedagogy. It is here that a commitment to interdisciplinarity begins to be articulated more explicitly.

As Williams recognized, these roots of the interdisciplinary project of cultural studies were defined not by particular problems or subject matters, but rather by a conceptualization of fields of academic specialization remaining in constant dialogue with intellectual and practical interests beyond themselves.[2] Williams moved against the idealist conceptions of culture as a march towards perfection, measured by universal values basic to the human condition, instead proposing scholars focus on the ways of life and shared values of particular communities at particular times.[3] This position is not one of anti-disciplinarity, even in its insistence on explicating the limits and incompleteness of disciplinary forms of knowledge and their historical formation.[4] Williams argued—as did Hoggart—that the actuality of regional, class-based experiences was principally excluded.

Later, Appadurai furthered the research agendas of Hoggart and Williams.[5] Whereas the latter recognized the disciplinary limits of established academic departments and their cultures, Appadurai is able to complement these critiques with a connection between the two "main senses" of disciplinarity—"(a) care, cultivation, habit and (b) field, method, subject matter."[6] Conceptualizing disciplines as sites to be won by new cohorts of persons from diverse backgrounds, Appadurai posits as a solution to the incompleteness of the research school the inclusion of the minoritarian as part and parcel of an academic education, in the form of "area studies along with anything that might count as 'minors,' 'minorities,' and 'minor literatures.'"[7] Particularly, Appadurai recognized the ongoing debates regarding cultural studies as revealing an "overdetermined landscape of anxieties," defined—tongue firmly placed in cheek—as an "omnibus characterization about its 'theory' (too French), its topics (too popular), its style (too glitzy), its jargon (too hybrid), its politics (too postcolonial), its constituency (too multicultural)."[8] Though ultimately sarcastic in tone, Appadurai nevertheless indicates clearly the roots of the cultural studies project's continued caricature by its opponents. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the integration of the cultural studies project into the fields of communication and media studies was fundamentally colored by a certain politics of legitimation.

As Hall later argued, the foundational works of the CCCS produced "no single, unproblematic definition of culture."[9] The Centre operated with a propensity to avoid offering up any definitive definition or methodologically suggestive view of what constitutes culture, instead functioning as a convergence of interests. Grossberg et al. similarly argued that there can be no final paradigm for the field of cultural studies, as the flexibility of its assumptions and procedures allows for an analytical freedom—a methodological bricolage—with which scholars may pivot and respond to the ever in-flux complexities of cultural life.[10] As the authors note, "cultural studies has no guarantees about what questions are important to ask within given contexts or how to answer them; hence no methodology can be privileged or even temporarily employed with total security and confidence, yet none can be eliminated out of hand."[11] This process of methodological bricolage would explode over the course of the 1980s, fueled by the international expansion of cultural studies scholarship and its subsequent influx of alternative perspectives and modes of analysis.

The pervasive determination to not define its central object has led to a pluralistic tendency fundamental to the cultural studies project. For those turning to cultural studies scholarship to free themselves from the rigors and restrictions of common disciplinary structures, this tendency has been heralded as the defining, most beneficial aspect of the project. For these cultural studies scholars, any disciplining of cultural studies was seen as an attempt at authoritarian policing and, thus, as antithetical to the character of cultural studies work. Alternatively, the reluctance to defining its central object of study has denied the cultural studies project methodological and procedural consistency. As cultural studies scholarship is authorized, implicitly or explicitly, to take many forms, a certain sense of cohesion is lost. As the cultural studies project became synonymous with intellectual, scholarly freedom and liberation, its defiance of definition became synonymous with its non-disciplinary politics. However, this need not be a zero-sum situation—historically, the strongest cultural studies scholarship has worked through the imbrication of power and subjectivity at all points on the cultural continuum.[12] A synthesis of the two approaches allows the bridging of the longstanding divisions between fact and interpretation—between the social sciences and the humanities—under the sign of a principled approach to cultural democracy.

Particularly, movements towards such synthesis, towards such a legitimated and disciplined cultural studies, characterized the project's development in the mid-1980s, as the Althusserian Marxism characteristic of earlier CCCS scholarship was expanded by way of a critical re/engagement of the works of Gramsci. As Hall argues, the specificity of cultural studies scholarship arises in its contingent location, its flexible positions, and its self-reflexivity.[13] The displacement of procedural or methodological issues onto predominantly thematic concerns has transformed the cultural studies project into a topical enterprise.[14] All this is not to say that the cultural studies project requires—or would even necessarily benefit from—establishing more rigorous, internally consistent protocols and procedures. Rather, scholars must come to recognize that many of the kinds of analysis accepted or lauded in contemporary cultural studies scholarship have proceeded on the narrow-minded assumption that addressing a certain set of thematically construed cultural issues equates to meaningful political analysis and intervention. Such scholarship is not to be construed as an automatic, embedded form of engagement. Major strides towards this process of synthesis were made over the course of the 1980s, culminating in major publications in the year 1986.

Setting the Scene for the Marxist Disciplining of Cultural Studies

To account for the simultaneity of (marginalized) subcultural members' status as consumers of commodities, producers of objects of resistance, and inspirations for recommodified appropriations of these objects, cultural studies scholarship would turn to socioeconomic analysis via critical political economy, concerned with structures of the economy and structures of meaning. These concerns need not be mutually exclusive—historically, the strongest critical political economy studies and the strongest cultural studies scholarship have worked through the imbrication of power and subjectivity at all points on the cultural continuum. To this end, Grossberg reflected on cultural studies providing a dynamic way of "politicizing theory and theorizing politics."[15] Combining abstraction and grounded analysis, over the course of the 1980s cultural studies scholars would come to focus on the contradictions of organizational structures, their articulations with everyday living and textuality, and their intrication with the polity and economy. These scholars refused any bifurcation that opposes the study of production and consumption, or fails to address such overlapping axes of subjectification as class, race, nation, and gender.

The Marxist disciplining of cultural studies

Whilst the cultural studies project was not necessarily founded on an engagement with Marxist thought, it would rise to the fore during its earlier years. Particularly, the field's early interest in ideology under the influence of the work of Althusser was part of a broader, eclectic experimentation with theoretical tools. Over the course of the 1980s, Hall's liberal, selective reading of Gramsci brought Marxist thought to the forefront of the project.[16] Simultaneously, Laclau & Mouffe's reading of Gramsci was decidedly anti-Marxist.[17] Hugely influential in the American cultural studies project, the authors' work moved strongly against the perceived intractable essentialism of Marxism.

The most commonly voiced objections to the engagement with Marxist theory in cultural studies scholarship problematize its perceived reductivism and economical determinism, which is to preclude any meaningful engagement with other forms of subjectivity, such as race, nationality, and gender. This problematization, in itself, is reductionist, as Marxist theory and analysis allows more than a singular approach to the questions of determinations within the processes of culture. The lack of cultural studies scholarship engaging with levels of over/determination within cultural life has authorized the treatment of certain thematically selected cultural elements in relative isolation from each other—or rather, as discrete entities whose contextual relations do not privilege their mode of production.[18] Extended to their logical end, such absences authorized a specific, preferred reading of cultural objects and events as, essentially, texts with no necessary reference to the place or conditions of their productions. In the mid-1980s, a renewed interest in Marxist thought worked to reconsider these absences in cultural studies scholarship, encouraging novel conceptualizations of power, ideology, and hegemony at the CCCS—and beyond.

From its earliest beginnings in the 1960s, the cultural studies project has been continuously concerned with questions of power, and through the construct of hegemony analysts have sought to explicate its machinations. Cultural studies scholarship as practiced at the CCCS was largely conducted within the context of an Althusserian Marxism, at its core motivated by the phenomenon of social class and "the rediscovery of ideology."[19] Building upon the neo-Weberian notion of class popularized by a generation of British sociologists writing during the 1950s, subsequent generations of scholars would turn to Marx in their explorations of popular, social working class culture, paying particular mind to the class power on display in trade unions and on factory floors.[20]

The power-as-hegemony position would continue to gain momentum throughout the 1970s, moving its focus increasingly away from labor and the economy towards ideology and culture. Scholars would come to recognize power as not solely economic, but also cultural. Capitalist state power could not be conceptualized solely as coercive and dominating—it was to be understood as working through internalized consent, as a product of ideology. Forwarding the maxim that the media did not reflect—but rather construct—reality, scholars at the CCCS (as well as those in its orbit) would come to strongly condemn positivistic traditions in media studies for neglecting any theorization of power, and for erroneously presuming the media to organically facilitate an integral consensus. These theoretical contributions would formally introduce to the cultural studies project a neo-Marxist framework built upon a specific, radical ideological critique. Resultantly, this period of ideological critique over the course of the 1980s allowed for the combination of the diverse theoretical perspectives of Althusser and Gramsci, indicating a bold intellectual, political commitment to the re/conceptualization of culture as a site of class struggle, hegemonic formation, and structural signification.[21]

These movements of synthesis coincided with the spread of the cultural studies project beyond the United Kingdom to Australia and the United States, initially, and the rest of the world soon thereafter. As cultural studies scholarship gained a foothold across international and disciplinary boundaries, the project would significantly adapt, evolve, and grow throughout the 1980s. Instrumental in this process of evolution was a 1983 special issue of the *Journal of Communication*, "Ferment in the Field."[22]. *Journal of Communication* 33, no. 3 (1983).]

“Ferment in the Field” and Critical Cultural Studies

In 1983, the “Ferment in the Field” special issue of the *Journal of Communication* would serve as an important forum for the discussion of the various epistemological forces shaping mass communication research in the United States. Explicitly questioning the legacies of positivism and neo/behaviorism fundamental to a significant part of American mass communication scholarship since the Second World War, the scholars’ collected works offered an essential alternative paradigm. This paradigm would come to be known as critical theory.

The critical theory paradigm would meaningfully engage the challenge of critical Marxist-oriented media research, predominantly concerned with questions of power and control. This scholarship was translated from European Marxism[23]—more specifically, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, whose consideration of political economy “requires that there be criticism of the contradictory aspects of the phenomena in their systems context.”[24] Consequently, “Ferment” would prove a locus of an intellectual, historical encounter between an American tradition of mass communication scholarship anchored by the social and political spirit of liberal pluralism and pragmatism, and European traditions marked by a clear, recent history of fascism, fragmentation, and displacement. This recent history placed purveying considerations of mass media as upholding democratic order and establishing consensus under radical suspicion. “Ferment” thus, served as more than a challenge to the traditions of American mass communication research—it served as a critique of American nationalism.

To understand the ways in which the theories and methodologies of cultural studies run through the special issue,[25] much may be gained from exploring the representative research questions in American mass communication research since the 1940s vis-à-vis those in the alternative paradigm originating in the 1960s from Europe and the United Kingdom. The special issue examined a wide range of research queries underlying the American mass communication tradition, such as the tradition’s preoccupation with the relationship between communication and the organizing process of community;[26] the participation and affective influence of mass communication on the social reality of modernization in the United States;[27] individuals’ stimulation by and utilization of mass communication to maintain their standing as a functioning member of society;[28] and the long-term effects of the media market on audiences and society.[29]

As the scholarship comprising “Ferment” underlines, the American mass communication tradition had become a social-scientific enterprise shaped by emerging functionalist, practical research objectives to measure media effects, which would result in both a professionalization of mass communication research, as well as a positivist sociological understanding of mass media. Of course, that is not to say that the administrative version of mass communication research conducted in the United States—as an alternative to which the critical theory paradigm was proposed—did not at all acknowledge questions of power and control. Rather, media criticism was largely conceptualized as a methodological issue—especially from the 1940s until the 1960s—which “was bound to threaten creative or innovative modes of inquiry” as a behavioral scientific orientation became both the source and result of inquiry.[30]

Furthermore, the impact of members of the Frankfurt School emigrating from Nazi Germany to the United States in the 1940s must not be neglected, for they introduced the German *Sozialforschung* to the American social science research tradition. With a decidedly Marxist formulation of theory, these scholars' primary challenge of American social scientific research was to the prevalent abstracted empiricism of "the assiduous collecting of facts ... the gathering of great masses of detail in connection with problems."[31] This underlined the importance of considering the historical character of mass culture and problematized the potential division between the individualistic values of mass culture consumption vis-à-vis sociopolitical realities.

Influenced by the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School, essential works in communication studies were prompted to explore the desirability of the industrialization of mass media—marked by concentrated ownership and integration—for American society.[32] Additionally, scholars questioned the emancipatory potential of public communication reconceptualized as commercial culture, as well as a shared arena of public participation and deliberation—a reconceptualization necessitated by the historical experience of totalitarianism.[33] This reconfiguration of mass communication/media studies by critical theory elevated the theoretical discourse in the United States by pressing communication scholars to confront the undemocratic character of mass culture, and—by extension—to acknowledge and overcome the possible collusion of research with the dominant political and economic system.

Transforming traditionalist American mass communication research to a critical media studies demanded the radical critiquing of positivist philosophy, neo-behavioral social theory, and society itself. In this endeavor, "Ferment" captured the pointed philosophical considerations of the Frankfurt School, ushering in a critical neo-Marxist paradigm for the fields of communication and media studies that would come to a head over the course of the next few years.

Critical Cultural Studies—1986

"Ferment" helped facilitate the incorporation of the British tradition of cultural studies into the field of American mass communication studies, by way of the former's intellectual relationship with critical theory. However, it is essential to recognize that the traditions of the British cultural studies project and the Frankfurt School did not necessarily conduct neo-Marxist scholarship in analogous ways. Rather, cultural studies scholars would approach the attention given to textual matters and audience pleasure from a neo-Marxist angle, whereas scholars associated with the Frankfurt School would apply neo-Marxist theorizations to the production apparatus of the media within the study of political economy.

Nevertheless, the integration of cultural studies into the field of mass communication studies would be marked by a distinct, emerging construction of cultural studies in the image of American communication studies, and—more specifically—in the crude, mechanistic image of a production-text-consumption process. Influentially, Johnson's framework for a cultural studies approach to media and communication employed a model of cultural studies resembling the trichotomous focus of conventional communication studies theory on the separate dimensions of production, textuality, and reception.[34] Resultantly, the broader project of cultural studies entered into media studies in the United

States by way of a reductivism of culture to communication.[35] This integration of cultural studies into the fields of communication and media studies urged a Gramscian responsiveness to the historical conditions and mechanisms of social power. These theories of ideology and hegemony were not intended to supplant theories of culture and communication—rather, they would allow for the erection of a framework on which a broader historicized articulation of mass communication and media effects could be built. However, the radical equation of culture with ideology by cultural studies scholars in the fields of communication and media studies would be critiqued as reductionist by those scholars unconvinced by their indiscriminating use of critical frameworks.[36]

Ultimately, in 1985, Carey argued that overcoming resistance to critiques of ideological reductivism requires the potential possibility of a productive comparative dialogue between British and American brands of cultural studies, as the impact and continued utility of the original tradition of American cultural studies was not fully recognized and appreciated by contemporary, post-positivist scholars.[37] The structural humanism common to British and American cultural studies warrants far greater recognition than it received during the 1970s and early 1980s, as scholars had yet to re/imagine this commonality as an indication of symbiosis. As Carey argued, the radical equation of culture with ideology within vast areas of cultural studies scholarship was reductionist, drawing major critiques to the project as painting with too broad a critical brush. In this assessment, Carey connects such forms of ideological critique with a certain pessimistic impulse of the cultural studies project. Whereas culture is phenomenologically diverse in essence and effects, the ideological critique of culture explicates the weakened role of coercion in contemporary life, whilst the description of the ideological state apparatus points to the displacement of a repressive state apparatus.

As one of the first communication scholars to seriously integrate the intellectual legacies of British cultural studies to an American context, Carey's contempt for communication scholarship conducted in the mode of positivistic science would lead him to herald cultural studies as an alternative paradigm.[38] Heeding Carey's call, the year 1986 saw major strides in this direction with the publication of monumental manuscripts by Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe.

Gramscian Neo-Marxism and the Symbiosis of Cultural Studies

Moving away from the project's earlier interest in ideology under the influence of the work of Althusser as part of a broader, eclectic experimentation with theoretical tools, Hall's[39] and Laclau & Mouffe's[40] readings of Gramsci brought a greater responsiveness to the historical conditions and mechanisms of social power to the forefront of the project.

As Hall posited, the works of Gramsci do not offer a general social science applicable to the analysis of social phenomena across a wide comparative range of historical societies. Rather, their potential contribution is more limited; it is "sophisticating" rather than constructive.[41] Operating within the Marxist paradigm, Gramsci has extensively revised and sophisticated aspects of the Marxist theoretical framework, Hall argued, increasing its relevance to contemporary social relations. Consequently, Gramsci's work has a direct bearing on the question of the adequacy of contemporary social theories, as his most important theoretical contributions function in "complexifying existing theories and

problems." Particularly, Hall sought to facilitate "a more sophisticated examination of the hitherto poorly elucidated phenomena of racism and to examine the adequacy of the theoretical formulations, paradigms and interpretive schemes in the social and human sciences...with respect to intolerance and racism and in relation to the complexity of problems they pose."[42]

Gramsci was not a general theorist, defying academic classification. Rather, his theoretical works developed in natural tandem with his social and historical context with the explicit intent of informing political practice, not an abstract academic purpose. Gramsci's theoretical contribution are to be read as refinements, revisions, and advances to Marxist theory. They are to be applied to novel historical conditions, related to developments in society which Marx could not have anticipated, yet without which Marxist theory cannot meaningfully be applied to complex, contemporary social phenomena. Hall underlined that theories and concepts operate at varying levels of abstraction.[43] Consequently, these levels of abstraction are not to be misread, as "we expose ourselves to serious error when we attempt to 'read off' concepts which were designed to operate at a high level of abstraction as if they automatically produced the same theoretical effects when translated to another, more concrete, 'lower' level of operation."[44]

According to Hall, Gramsci understood fundamental Marxist concepts—indicating the essential processes organizing and structuring the capitalist mode of production at any stage of its historical development—as introduced at the most general level of abstraction. As soon as these concepts are applied to particular societies at specific stages in the development of capitalism, scholars are to move from mode of production to a lower, more concrete, level of application. Therefore, whenever Gramsci moves from the general terrain of Marx's conceptualizations to specific historical conjunctures, the author does not cease to work within their field of reference, nor does he forget or neglect the critical element of the economic foundations of society and its relations—rather, Gramsci contributes to "the much-neglected areas of conjunctural analysis, politics, ideology and the state."[45] Gramsci did rage against the economic reductionism and positivist objectivism common in certain forms of traditional Marxism. He raged against those falsely positivistic models by social scientists positing the laws of social and historical development as modelled directly on the objectivity of the laws governing the natural scientific world. Such a shift in direction within the terrain of Marxism, Hall argued, would come to define Gramsci's contributions to Marxist theory.

Following a trajectory distinctly different from Hall's, Laclau argued adamantly against the taxonomic class reductions pervasive in Marxist scholarship, problematizing the facile paradigms of (perceived) bourgeois social scientists.[46]

After the Second World War, scholars across Europe and the Americas worked to reconceptualize Marxist theory, challenging both "official Marxism" and the contemporary, bourgeois traditions of the social sciences.[47] Over the course of four essays, Laclau tackles four major problems of Marxist theory through a critical review of various recent studies' conceptualizations and theorizations. Particularly, Laclau touches on the capitalist development of Latin America, the bourgeois state, the nature of fascism, and the nature of populism. Most prominently, Laclau's essay on fascism seeks to rekindle the theoretical discussion of the classed origins of fascism. Contemporary Marxist analysis, he argues, has made redundant "the complexity of fascism and [has] reduced it to a single contradiction: that existing between monopoly capital and the rest of society."[48]

As Laclau noted, “theoretical practice has been greatly hindered by the connotative articulation of concepts at the level of common-sense discourse and their rationalist articulation into essential paradigms.”[49] In its stead, Laclau called for “an increasingly theoretical formalization of Marxist categories,”[50] moving emphatically against the “process of pronouncing the class belonging to elements of concrete ideologies,”[51] and arguing that the reflexive class reductionism of Marxist scholarship has overlooked the critical insights of the work of Arendt—“It was not interpellations as a class but interpellations as ‘people’ which dominated fascist political discourse.”[52]

As Laclau underlines, “fascism, far from being the typical ideological expression of the most conservative and reactionary sectors of the dominant class was, on the contrary, one of the possible ways of articulation of popular-democratic interpellations into political discourse.”[53] Marxist analysis and political practice, thus, failed to recognize the simultaneous struggle of classes on separate ideological plains—as a class, and as a people. For example, for the *petit bourgeoisie*—the middle classes whose conduct is a critical component of gaining an understanding of fascism—“identity as the people plays a much more important role than identity as a class.”[54] Nevertheless, the ideologies of such a group are too diffused to “organize its own discourse and can only exist within the ideological discourse of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.”[55]

Due to the political line imposed on it by traditional Marxists and the theoretical reductionism of its leadership, Laclau argues, the working class has come to function as a class barrier, yielding the “arena of popular-democratic struggle” to the “monopoly fraction” of the petit bourgeoisie.[56] Revolutionary confrontation requires the ideology of the working class to be able to present itself as an heir apparent to national tradition—it requires an anti-capitalist struggle to become the culmination of the democratic struggles of the entire society over its dominant bloc. As an essential contribution, Laclau explicates the ways in which popular democratic interpellations do not share a necessary class belonging, even as democratic struggle is fundamentally dominated by class struggle.

During the rise of fascism in Laclau’s recent history, the working class failed to articulate itself as a hegemonic popular alternative to the dominant petit/bourgeoisie. Rather, the working class isolated itself ideologically and politically, allowing its silencing and neutralization by its dominant bloc. As Laclau argues, if the working class cannot resist the simultaneous threats of class sectarianism and social-democratic opportunism, it will remain unable to develop “hegemony over the remaining popular sectors.”[57] To this end, Laclau rejects the sterile formalism of past Marxist theory and practice, and posits a “theory of the specific autonomy of popular democratic interpellations” as an absolute necessity.[58]

Expanding upon this scholarship, Laclau & Mouffe seek to “identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, direction towards struggling against inequalities and challenging the relations of subordination.”[59] Arguing that those in a subordinate subjective position are not oppressed until externally transformed, the authors recognized this moment as the one in which social movements mutate into “conflictual moments.”[60] Consequently, those movements towards equality and equivalence are reliant on opening up new spaces for “social conflictuality.” The authors recognized the works of Gramsci as the starting point for their own work—as well as for any contemporary social revolutionary—as Gramsci gave mature expression to hegemony by conceptualizing ideology as a form of materiality, rather than false consciousness, which cannot be reduced to a matter of class. Nevertheless, Laclau & Mouffe perceived Gramsci’s work as

fundamentally limited in its theorization of a core proletarian will. As the plurality of forces in modern society are in some articulated relation, the authors used a development of the notion of over-determination to renounce the conceptualization of society as the unity of Gramsci's various elements—"The multiformity of the social cannot be apprehended through a system of mediations, nor the 'social order' understood as an underlying principle," as society has no intrinsic essence.[61]

To this end, Laclau & Mouffe posited a theory of social movements, which sought to explicate the types of action whose objectives are the transformation of a social relation constructing a subject in a relation of subordination. Moving against the humanist Marxist conceptualizations of the working class as the agent of any socialist transition, the authors explored the ways in which capitalism maintains power through hegemony and explicated the necessity of socialist efforts to exist on this plain of hegemony. As the authors note, "left-wing thought today stands at a crossroads. The 'evident truths' of the past . . . have been seriously challenged by an avalanche of historical mutations which have riven the ground on which those truths were constituted." The plural and multifarious character of contemporary social struggles—alongside their theoretical implications—have undermined foundationalist Marxism. Consequently, they endeavored to initiate a paradigmatic shift by issuing a critique of class-based essentialism to reverberate throughout the entirety of Marxist theory.

By placing an accent on hegemony, the authors moved against all forms of reductionism—especially the economism of traditional Marxism. By extension, the authors abandon, as a nexus of analysis, the premise of society as a sutured, self-defined totality. "Society" cannot be a valid object of discourse as there is "no single underlying principle fixing—and hence constituting—the whole field of differences." To gain such contours, society requires aformulation and establishment of hegemonic political relationship—a kind of political articulation. By this logic, if politics is a matter of hegemonic articulation, the relationship between politics and economics cannot be permanently fixed or stabilized, must be understood as dependent on circumstances and prevailing articulatory practices: "the economic is and is not present in the political and vice versa; the relation is not one of literal differentiations but of unstable analogies between the two terms."[62]

Nevertheless, Laclau & Mouffe warned that a mere dismantling of totality readily conjures up the peril of "a new form of fixity," on the level of "decentered subject positions."[63] Consequently, a "logic of detotalization" cannot simply affirm "the separation of different struggles and demands," just as "articulation" cannot purely be conceived as "the linkage of dissimilar and fully constituted elements."[64]

In 1986, Hall's and Laclau & Mouffe's divergent engagements with Gramscian intellectual tradition illustrate the processes of productive comparative symbiosis between British and American brands of cultural studies need not necessarily coalesce into a singular Gramscian tradition. Rather, a critical cultural studies framework, serving as a foundation for broader historicized articulations of mass communication and media effects, may be cumulatively constituted by various responsive considerations of the historical conditions and mechanisms of social power. Any triumph over critiques of ideological reductivism will be stronger for each complementary critical perspective.

Preserving Theoretical Critique and Political Intervention

Reflecting on the Marxist disciplining of cultural studies in the 1980s and the sustained prevalence of cultural studies in the decade's immediate wake, Agger posits these cultural studies scholars' explorations of issues of feminism, race, discourse, and postmodern textuality as decentering the project's earlier concern with Marxist class cultures. This resulted in a more complex, multifaceted perspective on contemporary culture.[65] Agger posits this period of exploration during the 1980s as following the foundational, Marxist Leftist cultural studies, as well as the subsequent period of scholars who, influenced by the Frankfurt School, afforded culture a relative autonomy largely unforeseen by Marx.

Particularly, Agger recognizes cultural studies scholarship as situated more firmly within the emancipatory tradition of the Marxist critical sociology of culture following these developments, differentiating between a conformist cultural studies which remains atheoretical and apolitical, and a critical cultural studies which recognizes that cultural reception—including cultural studies itself—must become a form of de-hierarchized cultural production in a new society. Favoring this latter, radical cultural studies, the author argues for scholarship that "decodes the hegemonizing messages of the culture industry permeating every nook and cranny of lived experience, from entertainment to education," and locates its analytical activity in "an everyday life structured by the dominant discourses of the quotidian preaching adjustment, acquiescence, and accommodation."[66]

This critical, radical cultural studies for which Agger advocates—a direct continuation of the explorations characteristic of critical cultural studies scholarship in the 1980s—would be more explicitly political, seeking to provide analyses and critiques of cultural texts and institutions. It would explicate the circuitries of cultural production, distribution, and reception in both ideological and political-economic terms in an effort to empower the culturally disenfranchised into both expressive and political action.

Continued Symbiosis

Although fissures in the disciplinary underpinnings of cultural studies were becoming more readily apparent near the end of the decade, the 1980s marked an era of productive growth that challenged core components of the project beyond its starkly Marxist and Western roots. Particularly, a "crisis in Marxism" allowed for Marxist critique to be reinterpreted not as a stable, fixed set of ideologies, but as a theoretical framework with implications for a vast array of subjectivities and discourses of power beyond class struggles. Simultaneously, the "crisis of the Left" forced critical cultural scholars to grapple with issues of social hegemony and resistance in the face of a militantly conservative Western world.[67] Consequently, the challenges and generative moments shaping the cultural studies project throughout the 1980s still mark a defining moment in the discipline's history.

This critical, radical cultural studies—informed and motivated by the scholarship of the 1980s—has remained at the forefront of cultural studies scholarship up to the present day, inspiring continued projects of symbiosis between various traditions of critical/cultural studies. Reflecting on these ongoing debates, Fuchs and Mosco sought to explicate the

ways in which a re/turn to Marxist theory and analysis would benefit the contemporary field of critical/cultural studies,[68] proposing a classification of Marxist dimensions of the critical analysis of media and communication, and—following Eagleton[69]—working to dismantle the commonly-held prejudices and critiques voiced against Marxist studies of society, media, and communication. As a neoliberal academy privileged studies of globalization and postmodernism, the debate about the place of Marxist analysis has been superseded by, essentially, an absence of Marxism in cultural studies.[70] As Fuchs & Mosco illustrated, Smythe's concerns that Western Marxism had neglected the complex role of communications in capitalism are proven fair by the clear contraction of the output of scholarly Marxist articles between the 1980s and the 2000s.[71] This period was marked by "the intensification of neoliberalism, the commodification of everything (including public service communication in many countries), and a strong turn towards postmodernism and culturalism in the social sciences."[72] As Fuchs and Mosco continuously underlined, "the work of Marx provides an essential building block" for any scholar intending to critically study communication, wishing to use that research for social change, as "to critically examine communication we need to engage with the analysis and critique of capitalism, class, exploitation and with practical struggles for emancipation."[73] A Marxist theory of communication, therefore, sees communication in relation to capitalism; "placing in the foreground the analysis of capitalism, including the development of the forces and relations of production, commodification and the production of surplus value, social class divisions and struggles, contradictions and oppositional movements."[74] Particularly, Marxist cultural studies of media and communication are not solely relevant in their contemporary moment—rather, its relevance stems from cultural studies' embeddedness into structures of inequality in class societies. Consequently, "Marx was always relevant, but being Marxist and practicing Marxism were always difficult, in part because Marxist studies lacked a solid institutional base."[75] Therefore, "the question is whether it will be possible to channel this interest into institutional transformations that challenge the predominant administrative character of media institutions and strengthen the institutionalization of critical studies of communication."[76] Cultural studies scholarship eager to engage with—and intervene in—political issues would do well to return to the project's foundational engagement with Marxism, and reconnect with the analysis of capital once central to the project's consideration of culture.

Notes

1. Mariah L. Wellman, "Years in Cultural Studies: 1983 – Stuart Hall Visits Australia and North America," *Lateral* 8.1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.25158/L8.1.13 < https://doi.org/10.25158/L8.1.13> .

2. Williams recalled, "These people were, after all, in a practical position to say 'well, if you tell me that question goes outside your discipline, then bring me someone whose discipline will cover it, or bloody well get outside of the discipline and answer it yourself.' It was from the entirely rebellious and untidy situation that the extraordinarily complicated and often muddled convergences of what became Cultural Studies occurred." It was, for Williams, a project of "{taking} the best we can in intellectual work and going with it in this very open way to confront people for whom it is not a way of life, for whom it is not in any probability a job, but for whom it is a matter of their own intellectual interest, their own understanding of the pressures on them, pressures of every kind, from the most personal to the most broadly political." Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London, UK: Verso, 1989), 157, 162.

3. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1975).

4. Williams did not advocate for an abstract critical progressivism or a principled opposition to structure per se—rather, expressing a specific, pointed concern for what disciplinary knowledge

unavoidably excludes and how it is thereby rendered incomplete in the face of actual social and cultural relationships.

5. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

6. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 30.

7. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 34.

8. Arjun Appadurai, "Diversity and Disciplinarity as Cultural Artifacts," in *Disciplinarity and Dissent in Cultural Studies*, ed. Cary Nelson and Dilip Gaonkar (New York: Routledge, 1996), 30.

9. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," *Media, Culture, and Society* 2, no. 1(1980): 57–72.

10. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

11. Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, *Cultural Studies*, 2.

12. As Murdock notes, "critical political economy is at its strongest in explaining who gets to speak to whom and what forms these symbolic encounters take in the major spaces of public culture. But cultural studies, at its best, has much of value to say about . . . how discourse and imagery are organized in complex and shifting patterns of meaning and how these meanings are reproduced, negotiated, and struggled over in the flow and flux of everyday life." Graham Murdock, "Across the Great Divide: Cultural Analysis and the Condition of Democracy." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 1 (1995): 94.

13. Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms."

14. As a topical enterprise, the field of cultural studies is cast as both eclectic and narrow. Characterized by a distinct set of frequently employed methodological and topical themes—whose circumstantial nature precludes accountability, reflection, and replicability—the project refuses the canonization of a coherent methodology. Such historical resistance to authoritarian policing would lead to what Morris termed the "banality" of cultural studies, through which the limited, eclectic range of theoretical coordinates allows for the re/production of a certain template of cultural studies scholarship, in which essentially the same thing can be said about any object in the cultural life. Meaghan Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 10, no. 2 (1988).

15. Larry Grossberg, *Bringing It All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977), 4.

16. Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 5 (1986): 2–24.; Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 28–44.

17. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1986).

18. The major shifts and developments in the field of mass/communication studies in the United States following the adoption of various positions and aspects of the cultural studies project hinged on the ill-defined, controversial term culture. Simultaneously operating as a geographic/historical location ("a culture"), a methodological approach ("cultural studies work"), and a theoretical approach ("cultural theory"), the terms culture and cultural studies came to function as broad signifiers, warranting further specification before application.

19. Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Culture, Society and the Media*, eds. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, & Janet Woollacott (London: Methuen, 1982).

20. Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1975).

21. Hall, "The Rediscovery of Ideology"; Grossberg, *Bringing It All Back Home*.

22. George Gerbner (ed.), “Ferment in the Field.” Special Issue

23. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Martin Allor, “The Political and Epistemological Constituents of Critical Communication Research,” *Journal of Communication* 33, no. 3 (1983): 208–218.

24. Dallas Walker Smythe and Tran Van Dinh, “On Critical and Administrative Research: A New Critical Analysis.” *Journal of Communication* 33, no. 3 (1983): 117–127.

25. It must be noted that the form of cultural studies proposed in “Ferment” as the alternative paradigm represented a version of cultural studies tailored for the discipline of communication. This version must not be mistaken as representative of the entire intellectual project of cultural studies.

26. John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems (New York, NY: Holt Publishing, 1927); Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1945).

27. Harold D. Lasswell, “The Theory of Political Propaganda,” *American Political Science Review, 21* (1927): 627–631; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

28. Harold D. Lasswell, “The Structure and Function of Communication in Society,” in *Mass Communications*, ed. W. Schramm (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1948; 1960), 117–129; Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz, “The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research,” *Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research* 3 (1974).

29. George Gerbner, Lany Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli, “The ‘Mainstreaming’ of America: Violence Profile no. 11,” *Journal of Communication* 30, no. 3 `(1980): 1–29.

30. Hanno Hardt, *Critical Communication Studies: Communication, History, and Theory in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 122.

31. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1972), 190–191.

32. Dallas Walker Smythe, *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981).

33. Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1979).

34. Richard Johnson, “What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?” *Social Text* 16 (1986): 38–80.

35. Similarly, Grossberg noted that a particular misreading of Hall’s Encoding/decoding model—and, by extension, Marx’s introduction to *Grundrisse*—equally contributed to the field’s eagerness to shape cultural studies in the image of a conventional, apolitical model of communication. Grossberg, *Bringing It All Back Home*; Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Love, and Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128–138; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (Moscow: Marx–Engels Institute, 1939).

36. James W. Carey, “Overcoming Resistance to Cultural Studies,” in *Mass Communication Review Yearbook*, vol. 5, ed. Michael Gurevitch and Mark R. Levy (London: Sage, 1985).

37. Carey, “Overcoming Resistance.”

38. James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

39. Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 5(1986): 2–24.

40. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1986).

41. Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.”

42. Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.”

43. Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity."

44. Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity."

45. Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity."

46. Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: Verso, 1977).

47. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology.*

48. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology,* 88.

49. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 10.

50. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 12.

51. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 97.

52. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 136.

53. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 111.

54. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 114.

55. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 114

56. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 124.

57. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 141.

58. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, 142.

59. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*

60. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*

61. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*

62. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*

63. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*

64. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*

65. Ben Agger, *Cultural Studies as Critical Theory* (London, UK: Routledge, 1992).

66. Agger, *Cultural Studies*, 5.

67. Sebastiaan Gorissen, Elise Homan, and Ryan Kor-Sins, "Years in Cultural Studies: 1988–The Crisis in Marxist Cultural Theory," *Lateral* 8, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.25158/L8.2.12 < https://doi.org/10.25158/L8.2.12> .

68. Christian Fuchs and Vincent Mosco, "Marx is Back: The Importance of Marxist Theory and Research for Critical Communication Studies Today," *Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 10, no. 2 (2012): 127–132.

69. Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (London: Yale University Press, 2011).

70. Gorissen, Homan, and Kor-Sins, "Years in Cultural Studies: 1988–The Crisis in Marxist Cultural Theory."

71. Fuchs and Mosco, "Marx is Back"; Dallas Walker Smythe, "Communication: Blindspot of Western Marxism," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 1, no. 3 (1977).

72. Fuchs and Mosco, "Marx is Back," 128.

73. Fuchs and Mosco, “Marx is Back,” 129. ↩

74. Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 94. ↩

75. Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*, 130. ↩

76. Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*. ↩

Author Information

Sebastiaan Gorissen

Sebastiaan Gorissen is a PhD candidate at the University of Utah's Department of Communication. He studies marginalized audiences and popular digital media, with an emphasis on the contemporary production of alternative pornographies.

View all of Sebastiaan Gorissen's articles.

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